



Imagine if you could see, smell, hear, and feel the life of 17th-century Colonial New England, while interacting with the people who lived there. You might see a colonial joiner preparing wood to make chairs for use in village houses or smell seafood roasting over a fire outside of a traditional Native longhouse. You might hear a Pilgrim wife pounding corn for pudding or feel a finger-woven storage basket made by a Wampanoag woman. Imagine you could be face to face with history.

The English Pilgrim and Native Wampanoag history and way of life are preserved at Plimoth Plantation, a living history museum in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Visitors can walk through the colonial and Native homes, stores, workshops, and farmland, and speak with the role-players who recreate the lives of many of Plimoth Colony's original inhabitants. These roleplayers (or interpreters) speak using early modern English dialects (similar to those of Shakespeare) or a mix of English and Wampanoag languages, they share the unique viewpoints of the time period, and they demonstrate the common daily life of the times.

Meet Mistress Fuller, one Pilgrim wife, and read about her experiences, both before and during her life at Plimoth Plantation.



By 1627, the Pilgrims had built a thriving village of small homes and gardens. It is re-created at Plimoth Plantation. Gardens of fresh vegetables provided “sallets” for the Pilgrims’ meals.

From the hilltop, you look down the sandy road lined on each side with sturdy little houses of weathered wood. In the distance, the ocean is deep green. Smoke from morning fires curls over the rooftops. Though the hour is early, the home of Mistress Fuller is already busy. Her husband, Samuel, is off to tend his fields, and she has finished milking her goats. She must weed her kitchen garden and pound Indian corn so she can make a pudding.

The Fullers’ cottage has one room with clay daub walls. Some of their furniture has been made here, but other pieces, such as her husband’s chair and a cupboard and chest, were brought from England. Mistress Fuller has lived in Plimoth for four years. Her husband came to the New World aboard the *Mayflower*—“a First Comer,” she calls him—and she followed three years later.

Why did you come to America?

My family has left England for matters of faith. In truth, we feel the king’s church is somewhat corrupted and not as close to Scripture as it might be. Yet, to separate yourself out of the king’s church ’tis to be counted an act of treason, and we were harried out of the land and so did dwell for many years in Holland.

But it grew very difficult even in Holland, for we lived as men in exile and in a very poor condition. The chiefest men of our congregation did look to settling in the New World, where we might raise our children English and in a true reformed church.

What did you think you would find here?

We knew not, certainly, what we should find in this wilderness. Some feared that, in truth, the changes of the air and the diet here should infect our bodies. And also we feared we should be in continual danger of the natural people here. But we put our trust in God, and he hath proved most merciful to us.

How is your life at Plimoth different from your life in England or Holland?

For myself, I had always dwelt in cities, and here we are in the country, certain! In Holland, I spent most of my day spinning and then should go marketing for many of the things that I need. Here ’tis that I will do all for myself. I think none of us has ever had to pound corn ourselves, for it should always be brought to a mill.

There are times when the men will fetch in a deer that we might have venison to our table. Such a thing as that would be counted a luxury for a richer man at home in England.

It did take me some time to grow accustomed to how quiet it is here, where there are not markets and there are not people preaching and selling things in the street.

But it is a good place to raise my son here. He is born here and strong and healthful.

And he will be raised in a good reformed church, so I think any difficulties we have passed along the way have been to this end.

What are the villagers' feelings toward the Indians?

I think we have good treated peace with Massasoit's people and good trade with many of the other nations of Indians here. I do not find in these years that I grow fearful of the naturals. But Captain Standish keeps all our men well drilled. Our palisade about the village keeps us protected, and our fort is good and strong. Perhaps it is this sign that we are in great strength that does as well keep us safe here.

Certainly it is God's providence that the first naturals to come amongst us spoke English. They were as God's instruments here in the wilderness to help our way.

What types of foods do you prepare most often?

It depends upon the season. It is fish that is the chiefest meat on our tables in the summer months, and salads from our garden. And white meats, and by that I mean things made of milk and eggs. In the autumn and the winter months, the chiefest flesh is the pork that we have from our own hogs that we slaughter. There is also the great abundance of wildfowl in this place.

As far as sweetmeats, that is rare enough, for sugar is most costly. This spring my husband did purchase some sugar, but I will have to use it slowly and carefully, for I know not when I shall get some more. There are not honey bees here, so we have not the honey we had from the English country.

What I grow in my kitchen garden is just things to dress the pot and for salads, as well as herbs for medicines. Salad herbs are such as spinach and lettuce, and roots such as carrot.

The chiefest of the new foods that we have found here is the Indian corn. It is very coarse corn, more like oats

in England. My husband prefers that I should cook it in puddings rather than to make bread of it, and then it is a good enough dish.

How do you make your family's clothes?

What types of clothes do you wear?

I do not make all of the clothing for my family. I will make the shirts and smocks and aprons and caps. But mostly our suits, my husband's doublet and breeches, and my own waistcoat and petticoats are such as we have brought with us upon our coming or have been sent out of England made by tailors there. The cloth for the linens that I make must also come out of England.

For myself, it is underneath everything I wear a smock, which also serves as my night wear, and it is very similar to

In colonial times, the English often referred to Indians as "the naturals."

Preparing a meal for her family, Mistress Fuller slices pumpkins that she grew in her garden at Plimoth Plantation.



Plimoth Plantation



Herbs were grown for medicinal purposes.

my husband's shirt, which he wears under everything. It is always of linen. And then over that, I shall set my bodices, and then a good many petticoats of woolen cloth, and then a waistcoat I will wear over that, and about my waist my apron and my girdle. Upon my head I wear a coif of linen. In the winter, I have a cloak to set about me and some mittens I have knit and a muffler to put about my chin. And hose, of course, and our leather shoeing. My husband over his shirt has his doublet and his breeches to wear and similar warmer things as myself to wear in the winter.

How do you educate your children at Plimoth?

There is not a school here. My father did teach me to read so that I might read Scripture, and so my son will be taught, as well as any daughters that I have. You will find some of the folk, especially those who are not of our church, perhaps do not value reading so highly for their daughters. But before even our children are taught to read, they must be taught to make their way in the world. So lads, when they are six or seven years old, go about with their father to learn his trade. And lasses, of the same age, will be learning to help their mothers so that they might themselves keep a house.

What do you do for leisure? How much leisure time do you have?

'Tis to my mind a somewhat curious question, for we are not gentlefolk here. It is gentlemen and gentlewomen who do not have to labor for their livings. But for myself, there is always a labor to look to except upon the Sabbath. It does not mean I do not amuse myself, for my son does bring me great joy. And sometimes I will set to doing some chore with my sister. Then we have time to recount stories or to

sing and talk with one another, and I find that pleasurable. I do also enjoy to hear my husband read out of the Scriptures to me.

There are different occasions out of the ordinary that bring joy. Well . . . shortly after I arrived here, Master Bradford did take for his wife Mistress Alice, and their wedding was quite a grand thing, even with King Massasoit and many Indians coming to it.

What are some of your common medicines, and how do you make them?

In the garden, I do grow all manner of herbs that I might use to keep my family in good health. I do grow lilies what I will take the flower and pound of it, and set it in the oil of olives sunning in a glass. 'Tis very good for rubbing to the temples for a headache, and 'tis also good in my duties as a midwife. I have some skill at midwifery, and many of the women will look to me for help at that time. Other medicines are simply made by boiling a bit of the leaf, or it might be the flower, or it might be the root of a plant, and drinking it down. Some of the herbs dry very well so that you might use them the whole year round.

My husband hath some skill at surgery, so if someone needs a tooth pulled or blood let, or an ulcer lanced, he hath the tools for that.

If you could look into the future and invent something to make life easier, what would you do?

There again is a question I find curious and doth bring a smile to my lips, for I think looking into the future, it is known only to God. Certainly I hope it is in God's plan that my son should grow strong and to come into his own land. I look to someday soon have a good, learned man sent amongst us as a pastor in our church. And I think, like all housewives in New Plimoth, I look to the time we have a mill here that our corn might be ground and not pounded ourselves. But all these things I leave to God's will.